Supporting secondary teacher candidates' identity development as culturally responsive teachers

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Abstract:
In New Zealand, as in many western democracies, the continuing disparity in educational outcomes has resulted in a growing call for changes in teacher preparation to better support culturally diverse learners in ways that are responsive to the particular national and cultural contexts. This paper presents findings from a teacher education program specifically designed to address this national need by preparing new teachers "who are critical pedagogues, action competent and culturally responsive." Grounded in socio-cultural theory, this practitioner-inquiry examines how the iterative use of a synthesizing framework within the program supports secondary teacher candidates to develop their professional identity as culturally responsive teachers.

Introduction:
In Aotearoa New Zealand, the gap between high and low achieving students is one of the largest in the OECD, and the disparity of outcomes for Māori (the indigenous peoples) and Pasifika students, students who speak a first language other than English, and those who experience special educational needs, remains a persistent challenge of practice for schools and teachers (Ministry of Education, 2008). This has resulted in a growing call for changes in teacher preparation to better support culturally diverse learners within the particular national and cultural context of 'biculturalism', a treaty-based socio-political partnership between Māori and Pākēhā (non-Māori) that guides and informs national policy. As teacher educators working in this context, we have taken up the challenge and opportunity presented to develop a new Masters-level initial teacher education program with the goal of preparing new teachers "who are critical pedagogues, action competent and culturally responsive."

For this paper, we turned our inquiry lens on a critical examination of our use of a graphically represented, synthesizing framework of culturally responsive practice that serves as a heuristic for the shared vision of 'good practice' for all stakeholders. Given the pervasive challenge of youth disengagement from secondary schools (OECD, 2016), we have turned our focus in this study to the learning and development secondary preservice teachers. The particular practice-based research question we take up in this paper is:

How does the use of the synthesizing framework support secondary teacher candidates to develop their professional identity as culturally responsive teachers committed to inclusiveness and equity?

We begin the paper by providing the context for our work. First, we examine the challenges for diverse youth engaged in secondary education and argue that teachers who work from a culturally responsive framework can better serve the learning and developmental needs of these young people. We then situate our preservice teacher education work within the national context of Aotearoa New Zealand, including an overview of the initial teacher education program which is the focus of this study. We then turn to the theoretical framework and methodology that underpin this study, and finally present our findings related to how the synthesizing framework has supported secondary preservice teachers to develop a sense of identity as culturally responsive teachers.

The Challenge of Secondary Education and Need for Culturally Responsive Practice

Far too many youth from minority and marginalized communities continue to experience educational disparities. These disparities result from the complex interplay of wider socio-political and policy issues, coupled with specific school-level factors such as, inequitable opportunities to learn, school and pedagogical practices that are 'blind' to their cultural and linguistic identity and funds of knowledge, and teachers who hold deficit views of their abilities and potential as learners (Alton-Lee, 2003; Sleeter, 2011).

Within New Zealand, as in many Western democracies, many students from lower socio-economic and minority cultural backgrounds can have difficulty engaging with the teaching and learning that typically predominates in schools (Alton-Lee, 2003; Howard & Aleman, 2008). Aotearoa New Zealand has one of the greatest proportions of disengaged 14-18 year-old students when compared to other OECD countries (Ministry of Education, 2011). As Boven, Harland and Grace (2011) have reported, by the age of 16, 36% of students in Aotearoa New Zealand reported being "usually or always bored" and "one quarter wants to leave as soon as they can, or already have" (p. 3). The resulting disengagement often leads to early school abandonment. Moreover, Aotearoa New Zealand has one of the largest gaps between high and low achieving students in the OECD, and Māori, the indigenous peoples of the land, are disproportionately represented in the lowest quartile of educational attainment

(Ministry of Education 2011). Māori youth are also disproportionally overrepresented in a range of negative educational outcomes, including referral to special education, placement in low stream classrooms, and higher expulsion and suspension rates (Ministry of Education, 2006, 2011).

The persistence of disengagement and abandonment in secondary education (OECD, 2016) serves as an imperative to reconsider the teaching and learning that take place in schools. Young peoples' own accounts of their schooling experience indicate their sense of the need to not only gain knowledge and skills needed for employment, but also to have schools help them address aspects of meaning and purpose in life (Tenti, 2012). As Levinson (2012) has noted, students have existential motivations for school attendance, including "the joy and drive to appropriate school knowledge in order to grow as human beings and solve existential problems" (p. 102).

Culturally responsive pedagogical approaches can respond to learners' existential needs by fully engaging their identities, languages, and cultures in ways that are meaningful and help young people envision a positive future for themselves and their communities (e.g. Alton-Lee, 2003; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Bishop & Glynn, 1999) In recent decades, scholars have identified the range of knowledge, skill, and dispositions teachers need to enable them to engage in culturally responsive practices that make discernible differences in learning for their diverse students. Culturally responsive teachers demonstrate a sense of agency and responsibility regarding their skills and abilities and a commitment to the learning and development of each and every learner in their care (Alton-Lee, 2003). They have a strong sense of self-awareness, and engage in ongoing inquiry, critical thinking, and problem solving that allows them to continually adapt their teaching practices and supports to meet their students' individual needs (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Such teachers acknowledge the reciprocal nature of the teaching and learning relationship, where the educator is also learning from the student and where educators' practices are informed by the latest research and are both deliberate and reflective (e.g., Macfarlane, 2007). Finally, culturally responsive teachers are well-informed and hold a deep understanding of the socio-cultural contexts of students' lives (Bishop 2003; Rogoff, 2003).

Given the power that teachers have to shape the existential and educational experiences of their students, culturally responsive teaching has been posited as an

essential component of reframing educator preparation in pursuit of equity (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). As Grant and Gibson (2011) have argued, teacher education must help new teachers, understand how culture impacts learning, help them develop cultural knowledge and connect it to their classroom practice and curriculum decisions, and challenge them to reject deficit views of their students, and their students' communities.

While there is a growing consensus among many teacher educators regarding the importance of preparing new teachers to be culturally responsive, defining what is 'good practice' for pre-service teachers remains contested and 'problematic' terrain. Many educationists have emphasized the importance of the social, cultural and political contexts of teaching, learning, and education (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Macfarlane, 2007; Williamson, Apendoe & Thomas, 2016). They argue that, locally, what is understood to constitute 'good practice' is defined in the specific cultural context.

Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers for Aotearoa New Zealand: One Program's Approach

For us as teacher educators in Aotearoa New Zealand, our work is framed within the socio-cultural context of our 'bicultural' nation. Drawing on the work of Dr Ranginui Walker (1996), S. Macfarlane (2012) has described the concept of biculturalism as: "understanding the values and norms of the other (Treaty) partner, being comfortable in either Māori or Pākehā culture, and ensuring that there is power sharing in decision making processes at all political and organizational levels" (p. 32). This construct of 'biculturalism' underpins our work in teacher education in two specific ways. First, it informs how we define and enact 'culturally responsive practice' by explicitly foregrounding Māori scholarship, knowledge, values, and epistemology in tandem with other Western-oriented scholarship. Second, it means that Māori cultural knowledge serves as the basis for developing teacher education programs and defining expected outcomes for preservice teachers. This does not negate the diverse cultural backgrounds of other members of our community. Rather, working in this way reflects our responsibility to ensure Māori rights as indigenous people to self-determination are upheld.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, teacher preparation is called on to reflect this bicultural focus and thus pre-service teachers must be prepared to better serve the needs of Māori and of other 'priority learners', as identified by the Ministry of

Education. 'Priority' learners include, Māori, Pasifika, speakers of languages other than English, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and those who experience particular learning needs (ERO, 2012, p. 4). Aligned to the bicultural focus, national professional standards also require that teacher education programs ensure graduates "have knowledge of tikanga and te reo Māori[1] to work effectively within the bicultural contexts of Aotearoa New Zealand" (Education Council, 2015).

Concerned about the continuing disparity of educational outcomes for Māori learners, and other 'priority learners', the Ministry of Education called for a 'step change' in the education system (MOE, 2013, p 2) This included a competitive application process to bid for funded opportunities to establish 'exemplary' teacher education programs at the postgraduate level that would "enable a substantial shift in the nature and quality of opportunities for ITE (preservice) students to learn to practice" (p. 2). The shift to a postgraduate level for preservice teacher education was a new policy and practice context for Aotearoa New Zealand, and offered a unique opportunity to innovate and build a new program.

The resulting Masters of Teaching and Learning (MTchgLn) program at the University of Canterbury is a one-year intensive professional preparation program that integrates research-informed professional knowledge, evidence-based inquiry and embedded practice-based experiences. It foregrounds Māori cultural knowledge throughout a range of structures, processes, and curriculum features, including: 1) the co-construction of a community of practice and mentoring model in support of pre-service teacher professional practice experiences in schools, 2) the framing of pre-service teacher inquiry through constituent courses, and 3) refining of the selection process to attend to dispositional features. The overarching goal of the program is: *To prepare teacher graduates who are critical pedagogues, action competent and culturally responsive, enabling them to be innovative, adaptable and resilient in supporting and enhancing the diverse learning strengths of each of their students.* This means preparing new teachers who have deep understanding of the socio-cultural context of students' lives and a strong sense of identity as culturally responsive and inclusive teachers. We also seek to help them develop a sense of agency and responsibility for learners.

[1] Māori protocols and language.

As noted, the program is purposefully co-constructed community of practice where university mentors, teacher mentors and the preservice teachers' engagement reflect the Māori principles of **Ako** (reciprocal teaching and learning) and **Kotahitanga** (working together). The community is intentionally cross-sector with a mixed cohort of early childhood, primary and secondary preservice teachers that take all of their courses together, with the exception of two sector-based courses focused on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

The MTchgLn is further constituted as a contemporary learning environment with a purposeful blend of face-to-face and digitally enhanced online learning. There is an explicit focus on working with schools and ECE centers with high populations of learners who are Māori, Pasifika, speakers of languages other than English, and those who experience particular learning needs (i.e. priority learners). Preservice teachers are generally placed in these settings in groups of 2-5, and experience two different contexts, each for a semester-long embedded practice placement. Each semester they spend one to two days a week for the first six weeks of the semester working in the setting with the mentor teacher, and attend courses at the university the other three days. During this phase, the focus is on using their practice-based experiences as the context for engaging with research and academic content. The preservice teachers also have a practice intensive each semester working full time with their mentor teachers for six weeks and taking leadership for the learning of students. We have embedded the use of an explicit inquiry learning model across all coursework and practice-based experiences to support preservice teachers in connecting theory to practice.

Te Poutama: A synthesizing framework for culturally responsive practice

The most unique aspect of the program is the synthesizing framework, *Te Poutama: Ngā Pou te Ako.* This synthesizing framework was co-constructed with our Iwi (tribal) partners and draws on the Māori visual metaphor of a 'poutama', which is often used to represent the process of learning, development or striving for greater knowledge, awareness or accomplishment (Fickel, Abbiss, Brown & Astall, in press). The program 'poutama' is grounded in research on culturally responsive practice derived from both Western and Māori perspectives (e.g. Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Macfarlane, 2004) and nationally relevant 'professional practice standards' expected for new teachers.

The poutama represents our shared understanding of the development of culturally responsive practice for pre-service teachers and constitutes a culturally encompassing framework and scaffold for their learning and development. It is organized around the program's four core values:

- *Te Taumata Mātauranga (Intellectual rigour and scholarship)* – relates to disciplinary scholarship and engagement with research and the evidence-base for teaching and learning, having the ability to engage in teacher inquiry, to think critically and take the perspective of others;
- *Te Manukura o Te Ako (Leadership of learning)* – relates to having a sense of moral purpose for teaching, agency and willingness to take responsibility for students' learning, and skill in dealing with complexity;
- *Te Mana Taurite (Commitment to inclusiveness and equity)* – relates to viewing diversity as a strength rather than a problem to be managed, having sensitivity and compassion, and being tolerant, respectful and fair;
- *Te Mahi Ngātai (Collaboration and partnership)* – relates to having positive attitudes towards children, families and colleagues, being willing to seek out and support collaborative relationships with students, families, whānau, hapū, iwi, aiga, and community, as well as pre-service teacher peers, university and school teachers and other education professionals.

As seen in the example relating to the core value of *Te Mana Taurite (*Commitment to inclusiveness and equity) in Figure1, cultural dimensions with descriptors of practice for each value are used to define pre-service teachers' development and growth from kia mārama (developing understanding) through kia mōhio (knowing and applying) to kia mātau (leading and engaging). The cultural dimensions of each value reflect key Māori concepts and are represented in te reo Māori (Māori language). The kia mātau descriptors are consistent with, and at the level of, the graduating teacher standards, and preservice candidates are expected to demonstrate sufficient evidence of teaching practice commensurate with this level of competence by the end of the program.

Figure 1: Te Poutama: Ngā Pou te Ako (example core value)

The poutama has been used in course design and implementation as a unifying framework for pre-service teachers to guide their own learning and development. It provides a framework to challenge their thinking relating to program values and constituent dimensions that support student learning and engagement. The values and dimensions of the poutama form the focus of pre-service teacher inquiry during their practice-based experiences, to encourage their learning through engagement with "puzzles of practice" and invite them to examine their own and others' frames of reference and assumptions relating to these puzzles (Blackman, Connelly & Henderson, 2004). Student learning is supported by having the pre-service teachers focus on how learners learn and the relational and pedagogical practices that support this learning, while pre-service teacher professional learning is directed, through the poutama framework, towards effective culturally responsive teacher attributes. The dimensions of the poutama have been incorporated into the various documents used during their practice intensives, both in terms of providing formative feedback and summative assessment. Throughout the program, the pre-service teachers develop their e-portfolios to evidence their learning and practice around the four core values and the corresponding poutama dimensions. In this way, *Ngā Pou te Ako* provides a

synthesizing framework that comprehensively supports their progress towards becoming culturally responsive and inclusive teachers.

Theoretical Framework

Socio-cultural constructivist theories of learning and knowledge inform this study, both in terms of guiding the program design and our inquiry into teacher education practice. Proponents of socio-cultural perspectives argue that what we conceive of as knowledge and how we think and express our ideas, our motivations, how we learning, as well as our dispositions, values and sense of identity are the result of our ongoing social interactions of a group of people over time (Shepherd, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). As Macfarlane (2015) summarizes, sociocultural theory as an interdisciplinary field "maintains that the social world (place, order, institution) and the cultural world (language, identity, values) have an impact on content and context that are prescribed or expressed in varying ways" (p. 20).

Socio-cultural theory helps illuminate how different culture groups or communities give rise to distinct worldviews and cultural practices, and supports our understanding of how these differ among groups (Rogoff, 2003). It is a theoretical framework that has been foundational to the "reformulation of education for Indigenous people" (Macfarlane, 2015, p. 27) in order to enhance educational policy and practices in ways that more authentically address Indigenous learners cultural and linguistic ways of knowing and being. As teacher educators working in a bicultural context, socio-cultural perspectives support our efforts to ensure that Māori knowledge-systems and cultural practices fully inform our program design and pedagogy, in ways that ultimately contribute to similarly transforming of the wider educational system in support of enhanced Māori educational outcomes.

Socio-cultural theory also informs how we understand our program as a 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and the profession of teaching as a 'discourse community' that "binds its members into a shared set of habits, attitudes and judgment about what matters" (Claxton, 2002, p. 22). From this perspective, we understand learning as "coming to know how to participate in the discourse and practices of a particular community" and as an enculturation process "into the community's ways of thinking and dispositions" (Putnam & Borko, 2000, p. 5). Moreover, from theoretical perspective we understand that within a community or cultural group there are a range of "meaning-making tools that mediate the communicative and reflective action" or the group and support their joint activity in

coordinating group member's actions (Wells & Claxton, 2002, p. 3). Within the MTchgLn program, the poutama serves as a key 'cultural tool' that represents our shared principles.

Methodology

The MTchgLn program serves as a strategic research site for our ongoing practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006) into our practices in initial teacher education. Practitioner research assists in focusing attention on how broad aspirations for teacher preparation might be given effect in the complex realities of practice. We have also drawn on the idea of "research as praxis." From this perspective, praxis is understood as the process of using a theory or theoretical knowledge in a practical way, in our case our use of socio-cultural theory to frame the examination of the use of the poutama as a particular 'cultural tool' to inform preservice teacher identity development. The concept of 'research as praxis' enables us to make explicit the interests and assumptions that underpin the research, while also recognizing that research is grounded in institutional and social arrangements, acknowledges and discloses the values base of research, and is overt about transformative agendas (Lather, 1986). As such, we acknowledge that the practitioner inquiry described in this paper is institutionally and politically located and serves a transformative purpose.

Data sources

In this paper we focus in on the professional identity development of 16 secondary teacher candidates who were part of the cross-sector cohort of students in the first year of implementation of the MTchgLn program in 2015. The primary sources of data were: 1) the final philosophy statement in their summative end of year portfolio, and 2) the summative final report from each of their two practice placements. The summative reports from their practice placements reflect the assessment of their development as co-constructed and mutually agreed by the preservice teacher, their mentor teacher, and their university mentor. For this study we have focused only on the data from on one of the four core values of the poutama, *Te Mana Taurite (Commitment to inclusiveness and equity)*. Of the 16 candidates, we had complete data for both semester reports for only 14. One candidate was missing data for semester 1, and a different candidate had missing data for semester 2.

The summative portfolio completed at the end of the year required candidates to have successfully completed their final practicum. This data set included a

philosophy statement for each of the 16 candidates. In the portfolio they were to consider their philosophy as a statement outlining their guiding beliefs, values, and commitments as aspiring teachers. In addition, they were to explicitly connect to evidence from their field-based experiences to demonstrate their enactment of practices aligned to their philosophy. Therefore, we have interpreted these philosophy statements as reflections of their sense of their emerging and growing professional identity as teachers, in particular their sense of identity as culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogues.

Data analysis

The data set was initially analysed separately for the summative final reports and the philosophy statements. For the summative final reports, we used the three dimensions of *Te Mana Taurite (Commitment to inclusiveness and equity)* as our analytic lens: **wānanga** (supporting learning through shared communication with ākonga, whānau, iwi and the community), **rangatiratanga** (developing and applying understanding of practice that is culturally inclusive), and **tangata whenuatanga** (provides contexts for learning where the identity, language and culture of ākonga and their whānau are affirmed)[2]. We reviewed the two reports for each candidate to identify and collate the evidentiary statements provided by the mentors for each of the three dimensions. For this data, we then looked for common themes of evidence for each dimension across the cohort of candidates. The philosophy was analysed using an inductive process to identify four key themes that emerged from their statements. Through the inductive thematic analysis, we also identified in their final philosophy statements a fourth concept that we called 'equity stance."

Developing a Sense of Identity as Culturally Responsive Teachers

Our program has a clear vision and aspiration to prepare new teachers who are action competent, critical pedagogues, and culturally responsive. To this end, we seek to enable them in developing a teacher identity aligned to this outcome through the iterative use of the poutama as a shared vision of culturally responsive practice. The emerging findings from this current inquiry into our practice suggest that all of the secondary teacher candidates positioned themselves as culturally responsive and inclusive teachers, as reflected either within their enacted practice and/or their

[2] Ākonga is te reo Māori word for student and whānau means extended family.

espoused philosophy. We turn first to their enacted practice as reflected in the summative final practice reports, before then examining their espoused philosophies.

Enacted Practice

At the end of each semester, each of the candidates was assessed on their demonstrated level of competency in relation to each of the three dimensions of the core value Te Mana Taurite (Commitment to inclusiveness and equity). A final summative level of competency for the core value was then determined via a consultative process among the candidate, mentor teacher and university mentor. The levels of competency correspond to the three levels of the poutama: (D) developing understanding, (K) knowing and applying, and (L) leading and engaging. Table 1 presents the summative rating for each semester for each of the 16 candidates.

Table 1: Individual Candidate Level of Competence Te Mana Taurite (Commitment to inclusiveness and equity)

Student	*Professional Practice 1 rating*	*Professional Practice 2 rating*
m15s19	K	K
m15s03	K	L
m15s02	K	L
m15s23	Missing	K
m15s13	K	L
m15s18	K	K
m15s10	D	D/K
m15s17	D	K/L
m15s22	L	K/L
m15s20	D	K/L
m15s12	K/L	L
m15s15	D	K
m15s04	K	Missing
m15s06	D/K	L
m15s14	K	K
m15s01	K	K

As seen in the table, most candidates showed growing competency for this core value across the two semesters. Five candidates reached the expected level of leading and engaging, with three other candidates showing some demonstration of leading for this value. Four of the candidates maintained a competency level of knowing and applying, while one demonstrated an emerging level of knowing and applying by the end of the second semester.

Common themes were also identified from the comments provided as evidentiary support in the summative final practice reports. These themes, presented in Table 2, were drawn from across the three dimensions for the core value, and included such things as demonstrating inclusive and adaptive pedagogy, engaging in reflective practice, incorporating student prior knowledge, and establishing respectful relationships with students. As comments were open-ended, they represent the aspects of practice that the mentor teacher and/or university mentor elected to highlight and note as evidence for the dimensions in support of the preservice teachers' self-assessment. Thus, the themes presented here reflect the most common aspects identified across the candidates' practice. As such they likely reflect the practices that candidates most consistently and competently engaged in, yet may not reflect the full repertoire of various practices enacted during the course of a semester. Moreover, we noted that in some instances the comments addressed the constraints on the candidates' practice due to local school context factors, most common was the limited ability for engagement with students' whānau or the wider community.

Table 2 Comments made within Summative Final Reports

Key Themes for Comments	**Professional Practice 1 N=15**	**Professional Practice 2 N=15**
Demonstrates inclusive pedagogy	6	11
Demonstrates adaptive pedagogy	2	10
Demonstrates reflective practice/responsive use of feedback/use of student voice	7	13
Incorporates/encourages students prior knowledge/creates opportunities for students to draw on own culture/identity	8	9
Establishing respectful relationships/ makes all students feel safe/welcome/valued/known	10	15

Philosophical Themes

Turing to the candidates' final philosophies from their portfolio, four key themes emerged that aligned with the program's guiding dispositions and practices of culturally responsive practice reflected in the poutama. These key themes were: 1) a focus on building caring relationships with students; 2) affirming and engaging the identity, language and culture of students to support learning; 3) developing a culture of belonging in the classroom, and 4) taking a student-centered approach that foregrounded student voice, interests, prior experiences and knowledge. There was also an overarching theme in their philosophies that reflected an 'equity stance' that

appeared to capture a holistic sense of their identity as a teacher that embodied these four practice oriented themes.

Building relationships with students. Preservice teachers spoke about the importance of building caring and respectful relationships with students, often using the Māori term 'manaakitanga' to capture this value of care. They expressed this as being focused on the whole student, not just their academic needs. As one of the preservice teachers noted:

> It is essential to care for ākonga and foster a culture of manaakitanga in the classroom. Manaakitanga contributes to the idea of a holistic schooling experience for ākonga, wherein their wellbeing is of paramount importance and their intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual needs are provided for.

Affirming identity, language and culture. This holistic approach also was reflected in the theme of affirming and engaging the identity, language and culture of students to support learning. This included not only knowing their learners, it was about embracing their diversity and valuing their different knowledges. They talked about needing to identify and build on their prior knowledge, as well as incorporate their students' history and experience. This perspective was captured by a preservice teacher who stated: "students need to have their own bodies of knowledge, experiences and culture acknowledged and embraces in order to maintain their engagement in schools." Many of them acknowledged this was "easy to say, hard to do," yet pointed to various ways they had sought to engage in these sorts of practices, demonstrating their commitment to the principle. One of the preservice teachers provided a vignette of his practice to support his philosophical stance, and the effect he had seen it have on a student:

> It's about incorporating their history into the class and building those positive relationships… So for example we had this class, and we had quite a few priority learners in this class, and in one lesson I introduced a pūrākau [legend] and in choosing this pūrākau I made sure this pūrākau was going to relate to them and that it related to the origins of Ngāi Tahu [local iwi/tribe], which is where one particular boy's iwi was, and just the turnaround in the engagement that we saw in this class was amazing. He was the kind of boy that would sit at the back and just talk the whole time and not really engage and then he was answering questions he was telling things from his perspective and how he felt.

Culture of belonging. Affirming the identities of students, was related to creating a "culture of belonging", which was the third key theme. This concept of a 'culture of belonging' was frequently referred to directly in their philosophies, and is a phrase commonly used within the program to capture the idea of creating an inclusive classroom environment. A preservice teacher captured this idea in her philosophy, defining a culture of belonging by explaining that it was important that "each student feel that they belong to their school, that they have equal access to resources and opportunities, and that they needs are being met." The preservice teachers' use of this term often reflected their sense of the positive benefit that diversity offered to the learning environment. Thus, it reflected a positive stance toward student diversity of language, culture, experience and learning strengths and needs, as opposed to seeing such diversity as a challenge to work around, or diversity as 'deficits' that students bring with them. One preservice teacher spoke about the importance of "understanding and appreciating diversity by viewing the positive that it is…the more diverse a school is, the more potential there is for a vibrant and rich culture of belonging which is an enormous benefit for students." The apparent appropriation of program discourse among the cohort suggests the positive influence this program principle had on their philosophical perspectives, and their pedagogical practice.

Student-centered approach. Seeing student diversity as a strength is also reflected in the fourth key theme of taking a student-centered approach that foregrounded student voice, interests, prior experiences and knowledge. The preservice teachers expressed their clear understanding that to ensure they could building the 'culture of care' to support diverse learners, they had to know their learners well and be guided by their interests, prior experiences and learning strengths and needs. Rather than taking a more traditional teacher-centered or knowledge-centered approach, they were keen to develop reciprocal learning relationship reflective of a student-centered approach. One preservice teacher expressed the importance of 'creating a reciprocal learning relationship…so as to position myself as a learner too." They spoke about the need to adapt their teaching and learning programs in response to student learning needs and strengths, so as one preservice teacher explained to "support the mana (sense of self) of students and empower them to reach their full potential." The challenges of shifting to a student-centered approach in the secondary context was captured with honesty by one preservice teacher who

shared his struggle from thinking he had to be "a master of content for students" to realizing this was distracting him from "focusing on the learning process for [his] students." After "delivering endless PowerPoints" early in the year he moved on and became "more focused on what the learner already knows, and what information they might be able to share with me and their class." He described how he had "started to focus more on student centered learning and how I can act as a facilitator and help students access information, as opposed to giving it to them."

Equity Stance. Another key finding from their philosophies related to the emergence of a well-formulated 'equity stance' that reflected their sense of having taken up the identity of a teacher who views student diversity as a strength that contributes to quality teaching and learning, and a commitment to ensuring student success. In their final philosophy statements the majority of the preservice teacher made clear and explicit statements related to their aims of education that focused on democratic purposes, ensuring equity in opportunity and outcome, and supporting students and their families in their aspirations. And nearly half of them explicitly framed themselves as advocates for social justice. They wrote about having a "sense of moral purpose" to enhance their students' lives, and the need to question their assumptions and engage in "critical self-reflection on [one's] own beliefs and actions." This equity stance was thoughtfully captured by one of the preservice teachers who wrote:

> We know that there's a disparity in the educational system and the social system in general in NZ for Māori and Pasifika, and it's not enough just to know that these issues exist. We have to take the next step. We have to do something about it. And we also have to encourage our ākonga too, because it is their responsibility as well.

A common theme in this equity stance construct was the acknowledgement of their power as teachers, and the need to acknowledge and reflect on this power, so as to avoid using it to demean or "trample on the mana" of their students, or limit their student's aspirations. There was a clear sense for many that they had a positive view of their self-efficacy in working with culturally and linguistically diverse students, and for ensuring enhanced outcomes for Māori students in particular. More than half of the candidates spoke explicitly of how they incorporated and used Māori values—including those drawn from the poutama—to guide their philosophy and pedagogical practice. In this way, their sense of teacher identity reflects a bicultural stance

necessary for working positively and inclusively in secondary schools to enhance the development and learning experiences for Māori and other diverse youth in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Implications for Practice: How a Synthesizing Framework Supports Preservice Teachers Identity Development

In this facet of our practitioner research related to the MTchgLn program, we have focused on how the use of the poutama as a synthesizing framework might support secondary preservice teachers in developing their professional identity as culturally responsive teachers committed to inclusiveness and equity with a sense of responsibility for all learners. Working from a socio-cultural theoretical perspective, we understand the poutama to be a 'cultural tool' within our professional community. As such, in the joint activity of preparing new teachers, the poutama has enabled us to coordinate our individual and collective actions in ways that support the construction of knowledge and understandings of, and commitments to, culturally responsive practice. It has in fact served as an important "meaning-making tool" that has served to "mediate the communicative and reflective action" of our community and support our joint activity (Wells & Claxton, 2002, p. 3).

As a 'cultural tool' the poutama has supported all members of the program community of practice—preservice teachers, university mentors and mentor teachers– in consistently and explicitly focusing on the aspirational vision of 'good teaching' related to culturally responsive practice. It has served as a focal point and scaffold for preservice teachers through the on-going discussions and meaning making about pedagogical practices and actions within different contexts of the MTchgLn, both within the courses and the embedded practice experiences. The poutama has clearly shaped the discourse among members of the community. We see and hear the language of Māori values, inclusion, equity and cultural responsiveness in the evidentiary comments in the practice reports, and in the preservice teachers' philosophies that connect directly to their actions in classrooms. For this reason, we argue its iterative use within the program as a shared 'cultural tool' has supported teacher candidates' development of their "epistemic identity", that is their view of themselves as learners and knowers, their values and sense of 'what matters', and their sense of agency in generating and evaluating their knowledge and expertise (Claxton, 2002, p. 4). Nevertheless, while the poutama has been a necessary scaffold, it is not sufficient in and of itself. It is the way it is used by the community members

to engage in on-going dialogue and shared meaning-making that must accompany the learning process in order to support preservice teachers to develop the repertoire of culturally responsive pedagogy, as well as formulate their sense of identity as culturally responsive and inclusive teachers for all students.

Conclusion

Globally, teacher education is being challenged to demonstrate that it makes a difference in preparing new teachers who can enable learning for all students, and support them and their communities in meeting their collective aspirations. Yet, what constitutes quality teacher practice and preparation to meet this challenge remains a complex and often contested terrain, as the conceptualizations of teaching reflects the differing priorities, values, histories and traditions of nations. By sharing this inquiry into teacher education practice in Aotearoa New Zealand, we seek to contribute insights into the situated nature of new teacher identity development, and illuminate how program context and practices contribute to new teachers developing understandings and commitments to culturally responsive practice and equitable outcomes for all learners.

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